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China's social credit system

China's SCS augments the CCP's existing political control methods. It requires big-data collection and analysis to monitor, shape and rate behaviour. It provides consequences for behaviour by companies and individuals who don't comply with the expectations of the Chinese party-state. At its core, the system is a tool to control individuals', companies' and other entities' behaviour to conform with the policies, directions and will of the CCP. It combines big-data analytic techniques with pervasive data collection to achieve that purpose.

Social credit supports the CCP's everyday economic development and social management processes and ideally contributes to problem solving. That doesn't make social credit less political, less of a security issue or less challenging to civil liberties. Instead, it means that the threats that this new system creates are masked through ambiguity. For the system to function, it must provide punishments for acting outside set behavioural boundaries and benefits to incentivise people and entities to voluntary conform, or at least make participation the only rational choice.

Social credit and the technology behind it help the Chinese party-state to:

- Control discourse that promotes the party-state leadership's version of the truth, both inside and outside China's geographical borders

- integrate information from market and government sources, optimising the party-state's capacity to pre-empt and solve problems, including preventing emerging threats to the CCP's control

- improve situational awareness with real-time data collection, both inside and outside China's geographical borders, to inform decision-making

- use solutions to social and economic development problems to simultaneously augment political control.

Source: Created by Samantha Hoffman, June 2018.

Extending control outside the PRC's borders

For decades, the CCP has reached beyond its borders to control political opponents. Tactics are not changing under Xi Jinping, but techniques and technology are. For example, in several liberal democracies, Chinese officials have harassed 'Xi Jinping is not my president' activists and their families after messages were posted to WeChat.[5] Research for this report also found other examples of harassment, including attempts by Chinese officials to coerce overseas Chinese citizens to install surveillance devices in their businesses.[6] More commonly, the CCP doesn't exert control overseas with direct coercion. Instead, it uses 'cooperative' versions of control. For example, a function of Chinese student and scholar associations — which are typically ties to the CCP[7] — is to offer services such as airport pick-up.[8] Beyond providing necessary services, these techniques reinforce the simple message that the CCP is everywhere (and so are its rules). Social credit embeds such existing processes in a new toolkit for regulatory and legal enforcement.